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## HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 22-02

### Seafarers Yacht Club

1950 M Street SE

Square 1080E Lot 0803

Meeting Date: February 24, 2022  
Applicant: Seafarers Yacht Club  
Affected ANC: 6B

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The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate the Seafarers Yacht Club, 1950 M Street SE, a historic landmark to be entered in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites. It is further recommended that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places for listing as of local significance. The Seafarers Yacht Club is eligible under National Register criterion A and District of Columbia criterion b for its historic significance.

The Seafarers Yacht Club property sits on a half acre of land on the Anacostia River transferred from the National Park Service to the District of Columbia. The clubhouse, constructed in 1964 by club members, is a concrete-block building with paired bow windows facing north and specially designed canted windows that face the Anacostia River and resemble a ship's pilothouse. Other contributing structures on the site include the circa 1947 boat ramp and marine railway and the 1964 concrete-block wheelhouse, constructed to protect the motorized winch for the railway. The docks and piers, although a seminal part of the Seafarers history, are noncontributing since they have been reconstructed and oriented differently to allow access to deeper water. The 1922 Anacostia Seawall, which runs through the site, was previously determined eligible, but does not contribute to the Seafarers nomination because it predates the club.

With Eastern Power Boat Club, the Washington Yacht Club, and the District Yacht Club, known collectively as the Anacostia Boathouses or Boathouse Row, Seafarers was determined eligible for listing in 2015. The Washington Yacht Club was designated in April 2020, and the current nomination of Seafarers formalize that determination. This application places the Seafarers Yacht Club within the contexts of African American recreational boating in the U.S. and the District of Columbia, discrimination in government facilities, and stewardship of the Anacostia River.

Seafarers is believed to be the oldest active African American boat club in the United States. It was founded by boat builder and enthusiast Lewis Thomas Green (1896-1976), who founded the club in 1945. Mr. Green taught woodworking and mechanical drawing at several schools in the District's Black public education system and had already begun looking for a place to work on his boats on the west bank of the Anacostia, where several boatyards and boat clubs had located.

But those clubs were expressly Whites-only. Green sought to lease his own parcel from the U.S. Department of the Interior, which controlled all riverfront property at the time.

In late 1946, the Department of the Interior drafted a plat of the land to be granted by permit to the Seafarers Boat Club and issued a lease on February 1, 1947. Signing on behalf of the nascent club were L.R. Evans, president, and Lewis Green as secretary-treasurer. The lease was for a swampy parcel with no road or public services at the far end of M Street on Anacostia Park's Reservation 343.

The property was then generally referred to Green's Boatyard and was used by the Seafarers as their home base. A newer group of Black boaters, the D.C. Mariners Boat Club, rented dock space here. In 1963, the two clubs merged under the Seafarers name with the goal of allowing D.C.'s Black population "to engage in the enjoyment of the waterways through safe boating and gentlemanly sportsmanship."

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbade discrimination in public facilities, including at property rented from the federal government. Leading up to its passage, many boating clubs nationwide made headlines for refusing to accept Black members—and occasionally, for welcoming them. In the District of Columbia, the Corinthian Yacht Club lost its lease with the Department of the Interior after it refused to consider the membership application of well-known African American businessman Theodore Hagans. When jurisdictions began to enforce non-discriminatory policies, many clubs, like Corinthian, opted to relocate to private property rather than integrate. The other clubs on Boathouse Row lost many of their White members, but the Seafarers Yacht Club continued its proud tradition of welcoming Black mariners and thrived throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

The club is notable for several historical "firsts." The Seafarers were the first African American club to join the American Power Boat Association in 1965, competing in several APBA races, including the notable Hudson River Marathon. The Seafarers also led the charge in creating the Anacostia Boating Association, formed in 1972. They provided the Potomac River Yacht Clubs Association with its first Black commodore, and they were early ecological champions of the Anacostia River, hosting the first Anacostia River Cleanup Day in 1985. Now a 35-year legacy event, the cleanup continues to inspire D.C. residents, particularly youth, and has been joined by a number of District and federal agencies.

### **Significance**

Seafarers has already been recognized for its importance to the city with citations on the African American Heritage Trail and D.C. Preservation League's Civil Rights Trail. The club was featured at the 2000 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in the exhibition "Washington, D.C.: It's Our Home." In 2020, the D.C. Council recognized Seafarers on its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, citing members' "dedication to keeping the Anacostia River clean, and their important cultural contributions to the District of Columbia."

Along with these recognitions and its historical importance as one of the oldest—if not the oldest—operating Black boating club in the country, the Seafarers Yacht Club is eligible for listing in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places under

District of Columbia Criterion B and National Register Criterion A for historical significance. The club is emblematic of the nationwide struggle of African Americans for equal access to facilities and fair treatment. From Lewis Green's pioneering efforts with the U.S. Department of the Interior to provide Black mariners with a place that welcomed them and their boats, through successes in a largely White-dominated sport, and through their efforts to protect and celebrate the Anacostia, the Seafarers Yacht Club remains a vital part of the city's history.

The half-acre club property includes two contributing buildings (clubhouse and wheelhouse), two contributing structures (marine railway and boat ramp), and the non-contributing docks, shed, and flagpole. It retains all the hallmarks of a boat club with a clubhouse facing the Anacostia River through an expanse of glass, outdoor space for enjoyment of members and guests, and marine facilities that clearly denote the property's function. Its integrity of location, design, feeling, association, materials, and craftsmanship remain intact, although the setting has been compromised by the construction of the Anacostia Community Boathouse immediately to the west, and the original clubhouse was razed in the 2000s. The period of significance for Seafarers extends from the club's creation in 1945 until the construction of its present clubhouse in 1964.

Though its buildings and structures are modest, the site is imbued with historical significance as the home of the Seafarers Yacht Club, which forged a parallel path alongside the White boating community. The club property remains as a physical reminder not only of the policies and practices that segregated Blacks and Whites, but the proud resilience needed to overcome them.